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FY 2009 FOREIGN ASSISTANCE GOALS

The United States Government (USG) is committed to fostering democratic governance and protecting fundamental rights and liberties in the Americas. As nations of the Americas work to protect their citizens, consolidate democratic gains, build upon economic growth, improve people's health, and better educate their workforces, partnership plays an increasingly important role in fulfilling shared development goals. U.S. efforts in the Western Hemisphere are focused on building cooperation through multilateral fora and joint programs designed to achieve common objectives. These joint endeavors help unify the region, fostering new initiatives and improving existing bilateral relationships and programs. In FY 2009, the Department of State Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA) Regional Fund provided crucial support to USG collaborative efforts with hemispheric partners, mainly through the Central America-Dominican Republic-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) and the Merida Initiative.

The U.S. has far-reaching economic and geographic links to Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, and a compelling national security interest in helping the governments of this region succeed in the battle against organized crime and insecurity. The assistance under the Merida Initiative will improve security and justice by achieving several objectives: breaking the power and impunity of criminal organizations; enhancing law enforcement capacity; strengthening border, air, and maritime controls; improving the capacity of justice systems; curtailing gang activity; and reducing the demand for drugs throughout the region. The Initiative is implemented with a whole-of-government approach that draws upon USG agencies' expertise to support the governments and people of Mexico, Central America (Merida in Central America is called the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) as of FY 2010), Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. The governments of the region have demonstrated the commitment necessary to partner with the USG in this effort, which has required especially close coordination with Central American governments.

The USG provides assistance to CAFTA-DR signatory countries to build trade capacity within the

Programs discussed in this publication are funded through the Department of State. The U.S. Agency for International Development does not currently provide direct assistance to State Western Hemisphere Regional.

nations so they can be more active and prosperous trading partners with the United States. USG programs focused on strengthening and improving implementation and enforcement of labor and environmental laws at the national, local, and municipal levels, as well as developing the institutional capacity of national labor and environmental authorities throughout the CAFTA-DR region.

HIGHLIGHTS BY PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

Peace and Security

The WHA Regional Fund supported the USG's cooperative approach to regional security through the Merida Initiative in Central America (called the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) as of FY 2010). Assistance in the Peace and Security program area provides capacity-building support to local and national governments to fight crime, especially the gangs and traffickers that pose a regional security threat. USG assistance provides equipment, logistics support, and training for national militaries and police forces to monitor their borders and maintain order within. The broad-based support that increases partner nations' institutional capacity to reduce the power and influence of criminal organizations takes many forms, such as helicopters, interceptor boats, IT systems, communications, databases, logistics training, technical training, forensics, youth interventions, drug-demand reduction activities, and peer exchanges.

While the programs funded through the Merida Initiative are in their early stages, positive results have already been achieved. Ninety thousand kilograms of illicit narcotics were seized by host governments in USG supported regions in 2009, and three nations installed and initiated fully operational communications systems.

Governing Justly and Democratically

Improving democracy and governance throughout Central America and the Caribbean is a priority for both CAFTA-DR and the Merida Initiative. As part of Merida, the USG is strengthening the capacity of local governments to prosecute criminals, whereas CAFTA-DR programs aim to strengthen the labor markets in signatory countries.

In support of the Merida Initiative in Central America, the USG provides assistance in the Rule of Law and Human Rights, Good Governance, and Civil Society program areas to governments and civic groups in Merida countries. To accomplish the USG and partner objectives, USG agencies work with civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, police agencies, universities, prosecutors, public defenders, and justice ministries to implement an all-encompassing portfolio of activities. USG assistance facilitates justice sector reform and civil society development through technical assistance, equipment, training, and peer exchanges. Additionally, the USG-supported independent International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala demonstrated great success investigating and dismantling violent criminal organizations.

USG programs implemented by the Department of State (DOS) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) strengthen institutions that support labor rights in order to strengthen labor markets and thus the competitiveness of CAFTA-DR nations' economies. USG programs are achieving this goal by strengthening ministries of labor, modernizing labor justice systems, supporting efforts to eliminate all types of labor discrimination, and promoting a culture of compliance with labor laws. The USG is also working with the International Labor Organization, the Inter-American Development Bank, and other donors to establish benchmarks and monitor progress in beneficiary countries.

Among the achievements in FY 2009, USG assistance improved the internal organizational capacity of 193 civil society organizations, provided labor rights training for 2,610 people, and supported 125 independent democratic trade/labor unions that promoted international core labor standards.

Economic Growth

The USG began implementing environmental projects funded as part of CAFTA-DR that will begin yielding results in FY 2010. To support signatory nations of CAFTA-DR, USAID and DOS are bolstering capacity to establish and adhere to environmental standards that will enable member nations to compete fairly. The focus of the environmental programs is on improving environmental law enforcement capabilities, increasing public participation and transparency to support informed decision-making, supporting market-based conservation through sustainable agriculture and tourism, and improving private sector environmental compliance.

As part of the CAFTA-DR commitment, the USG is also supporting the establishment of multilateral institutions that will monitor environmental compliance among CAFTA-DR nations. The USG is providing operating support for the Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration, which will investigate complaints alleging the failure of countries to enforce their environmental laws effectively. It will fund an outside party to monitor and evaluate progress made under the Environmental Cooperation Agreement, and support priorities or activities identified by the Environmental Cooperation Commission.